

CIA Should Stay Out of Policy

Involvement There Hinders Vital Intelligence-Gathering Role

By ERNEST CONINE

STATINTL

Assume that the situation of the anti-Sandinista rebels in Nicaragua grows hopeless and that U.S. intelligence sources in the area pass the word to Washington. Can anybody imagine William J. Casey, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, marching to the White House and telling President Reagan that the CIA's not-so-secret war in the region is doomed to failure?

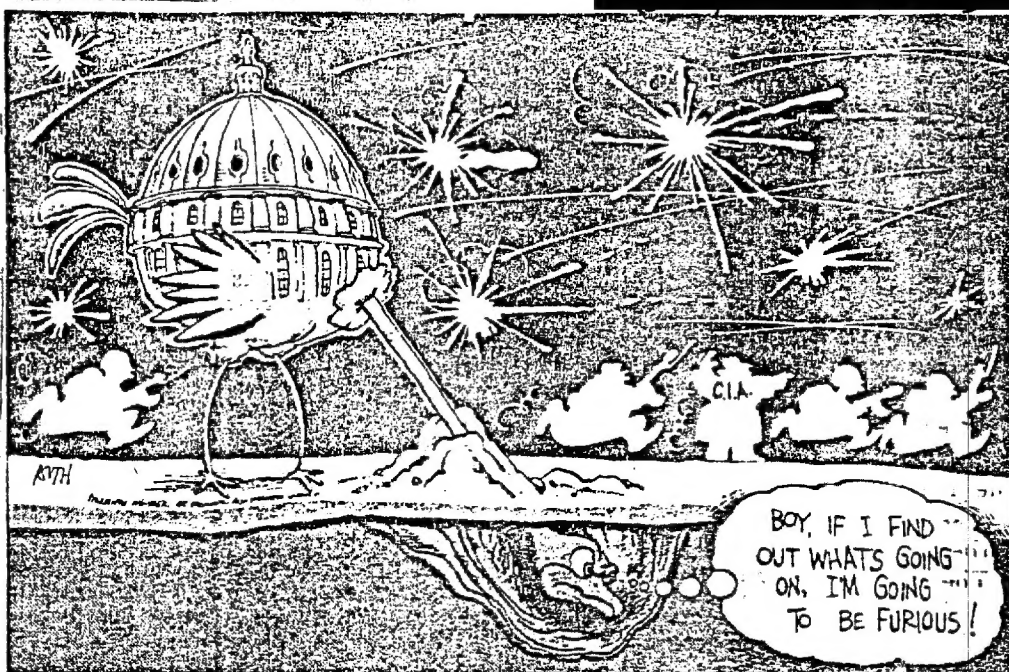
The answer is self-evident, which means that maybe it is time to consider what might be done to discourage CIA chiefs from becoming involved in policy-making.

It is hard for close readers of newspapers or magazines to go longer than a month or two without reading an interview in which Casey assures us that the Boss is on the right track in his policies toward the Soviet Union, the Middle East or Nicaragua. Is that really an appropriate function for the head of the CIA, who by definition is supposed to provide the President and other policy-makers with objective information and analyses on what is happening in the world outside our borders? Surely not.

What we need is a tradition of CIA directors who look an interviewer straight in the eye and say that assessing the wisdom or stupidity of policies being pursued by an Administration in power is none of their business, that their only job is to provide reliable intelligence. It would be nicer still if CIA chiefs would tell Presidents and White House advisers that they would rather not offer advice on policy questions, and would prefer to limit themselves to presenting intelligence that policy-makers need in choosing among alternative actions.

Unfortunately, it's unlikely to happen. There have been notable exceptions, but Presidents tend to appoint CIA chiefs who are personally close and/or politically reliable. Casey is a case in point; he has an intelligence background, but is first and foremost a Reagan man.

Unlike British or Soviet intelligence chiefs, American CIA directors are public figures who appear on television and are interviewed in newspapers. They make speeches and give public testimony before congressional committees. All of this means that they are thrust into the role of advocates for Administration policy.



Less visible, but perhaps more important, is the fact that they can come under pressure to tailor intelligence assessments to support policy. During the Carter Administration, the Senate Intelligence Committee worried that the much-publicized CIA study of Soviet oil production was being manipulated by the White House to develop support for the Carter energy program.

Justly or not, some people in the intelligence community itself charged that Adm. Stansfield Turner, then head of the CIA, was distorting intelligence estimates to make them dovetail with the Carter Administration's foreign policy.

As one critic said at the time, "The great trap of intelligence is to search for evidence supporting your own view. . . . If you have access to policy-makers, you can become sensitized into justifying their decisions." The temptation is especially strong when the CIA chief becomes directly involved in policy-making, and stronger still when the CIA is itself involved in covert operations.

When the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba turned into a deeply embarrassing fiasco for President John F. Kennedy, it was pretty obvious that the failure was due in part to faulty intelligence that overestimated the likelihood of an anti-Castro

uprising in support of the invaders. Would the CIA have done a better job if it had not been running the invasion? A lot of people thought so. For a time there was serious debate as to whether covert military operations should be done by the CIA, with the recurring danger of warping the agency's intelligence function, or by special units within the Defense Department.

Nothing was done, partly because there are some good arguments against such a shift in jurisdiction. But the question is still relevant, as demonstrated by the example of Casey and covert operations in Nicaragua.

With some reason, Congress is in another of its periodic bouts of disillusionment with CIA involvement in covert military operations. But the mood will pass. As former Deputy CIA Director Bobby R. Inman once said, "Every Administration ultimately turns to the use of covert operations when they become frustrated about the lack of

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Libyan case tests limits of West's spy tech

Qaddafi note easily caught, but not deciphered in time

By Peter Grier
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Washington

Modern espionage is not primarily a matter of men in trench coats and meetings in bazaars. Electronic spying — with dish antennas, satellite cameras, and computer analysis — is more widespread than most Americans probably realize.

In recent months, a series of unprecedented revelations has hinted at the extent of Western high-tech snooping.

President Reagan, defending the invasion of Grenada, made public a sharp satellite or plane photo of a Cuban-built Grenadian runway. At the United Nations, the United States played for delegates a tape of the Soviet radio transmissions that doomed the downed Korean Air Lines Flight 7.

And now, stories from Britain indicate that Western antennas last week intercepted a Libyan radio message that ordered Libyan officials in London to shoot anti-Qaddafi demonstrators.

Espionage today "depends on both human and electronic intelligence. One thing you learn very early in the intelligence game is you don't want to depend on a single source of information," said retired Vice-Adm. Bobby Inman, former director of the National Security Agency (NSA), in a recent interview.

The NSA is the chief US agency involved in electronic eavesdropping. It is six times the size of the Central Intelli-

gence Agency, according to one congressional estimate. Its headquarters, halfway between Baltimore and Washington, is a huge building with so many radar domes that it looks like an airport terminal.

NSA listening posts are all over the world. According to James Bamford's book "The Puzzle Palace," they range from a Virginia antenna farm that likely eavesdrops on Washington embassies to Pine Gap, an Australian station that receives signals from Soviet missiles in flight.

NSA satellites can tell whether a plane on a Siberian runway is a bomber or a prototype space shuttle, according to one intelligence source. Records of the American Telephone & Telegraph Company show an incredible number of "receive only" phone lines flowing into NSA headquarters — many of which may carry intercepted radio messages.

But Western SIGINT (government talk for "signals intelligence") is far from a purely American effort. NSA stations are probably run in conjunction with other nations — and many US allies have their own SIGINT efforts.

The KAL 7 tape could have been recorded by Japanese listening posts. Britain's spy agency, MI5, is well known; its SIGINT agency, Government Communications Headquarters, is less famous.

It is probable that the British themselves intercepted the Libyan radio message, one knowledgeable source muses.

The capture of the Libyan communication, however, points out the limits of electronic eavesdropping. Catching messages is not too hard — but turning them into useful intelligence is. The Libyan message, according to published reports, was not decoded and translated in time to stop the April 17 shooting outside the Libyan embassy in London.

Ciphers are today so tough that state-of-the-art code breaking requires powerful supercomputers and highly trained analysts. (The NSA, for instance, is a major employer of PhDs in mathematical statistics.) In fact, it is widely thought that large countries such as the US and the USSR can, if they want, transmit in codes that are currently unbreakable. Only the top ciphers of smaller nations — such as Libya — can be readily unraveled.

Until about 10 years ago, third-world nations relied on World War II surplus code machines, says David Kahn, author of "The Codebreakers," the definitive history of cryptology.

These machines produced codes readily crackable by larger countries. Today, however, "probably the machines used by Libya and other third-world countries are manufactured by commercial firms — in particular, Crypto AG," a Swiss company, says Mr. Kahn.

Even though they are bought off the rack, these machines "aren't lousy systems," he says.

For Libya and other small countries, the danger lies not so much in using bad machines as in having clumsy clerks. Third-world code operators are less well trained than their Western counterparts, and more prone to the transmission errors that "are really where your code breaks come from," says Kahn.

STATINT

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Security Experts Differ on Effect Of CIA's Mining

By Joanne Omang
and Walter Pincus
Washington Post Staff Writers

Former national security affairs adviser Brent Scowcroft said yesterday that the CIA's mining of harbors in Nicaragua "is hurting the CIA," harming Reagan administration efforts to deal with the leftist Sandinista government in Nicaragua and reducing the ability of the United States to use covert action as a policy tool.

In addition, Adm. Bobby R. Inman, former deputy director of the CIA and director of the National Security Agency, said that, with few exceptions, such covert operations are a bad idea because they seldom are supported by the American public.

Another senior intelligence community figure, former CIA director William E. Colby, said the degree of agency involvement in the mining of Nicaraguan waters was no different from its participation in other covert paramilitary operations worldwide.

Scowcroft, a retired general who has served over the past two years as a part-time adviser to President Reagan on arms control and strategic weapons, told reporters at a breakfast meeting that the mining controversy has "got in the way of a serious debate over Nicaragua" and that something must be done to limit the Sandinista regime's apparent desire to export revolution.

However, covert action "will be less available in the future" as a policy instrument because of the current debate, he said.

"I think the recent furor is hurting the CIA, and that's too bad," because the agency is just recovering from criticism during the late 1970s of its earlier covert operations, Scowcroft said.

He was a national security adviser to presidents Nixon and Ford.

In fact, he added, if the mining was done "as an act to convince Nicaragua" to stop exporting arms, perhaps "we should have done it overtly" in order to be more effective. Other possible open actions might include "a blockade or a quarantine," he said.

Scowcroft said covert operations should be small in order to avoid discovery. "You employ covert operations to disassociate the United States from the activities," he told reporters. "When they get as massive as this seems to be, then they are more difficult" to keep secret and "tend to be counterproductive," he said.

Inman expressed similar views. "I'm not prepared to cast an absolute vote, but if you are going to decide you've got to do something beyond diplomacy and trade," he said, "do it overtly. Do it large. Do it fast. And get out fast. Don't get involved in one that's going to have a long-term commitment. If it does, that's not going to be sustainable."

Inman, interviewed at the computer research consortium he heads in Austin, said most covert operations start because of frustration with diplomacy and overt action, or for domestic political reasons, not because covert action is the best way to deal with an international problem.

But public consensus that the action is appropriate is essential to its success, Inman said. "If you cannot build a consensus that holds, the policy is in trouble," he said.

Colby, in an appearance taped for broadcast today on Cable News Network's "Newsmaker Saturday" said

that, in actions during the 1960s in Laos and Cuba's Bay of Pigs, agents "were providing logistics, communications, air transport, training, things of that nature, and liaison, coordination, but not going out to the patrols and in the fights."

In Nicaragua, "it was consistent with what I said: CIA officers were more than 12 miles offshore in the boats, providing support for the actual operation going in as distinct from the CIA officer being on the boat going in to lay the mines," Colby said.

Colby, who was CIA director from 1973 to 1976, said members of the intelligence committees in Congress understand the degree of CIA participation in covert actions and that he would have briefed them on the mining "the way I understand it was done on this occasion."

Some committee members, including Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.), said they were not properly briefed in advance. Both houses of Congress last week approved non-binding resolutions condemning the mining.

Serious questions about White House staff coordination and review of CIA covert operations in Nicaragua also were raised yesterday by a former Nixon aide who asked not to be identified.

This former official said he believed that the "international implications" of the CIA mining operation had not been adequately reviewed "and probably fell through the cracks" in the White House staff. Internal competition and conflicts among presidential advisers and Cabinet members, this former aide said, had led to a breakdown in the coordination that had worked in previous administrations.

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Inman: little chance of intentional domestic spying

Bobby Ray Inman doesn't look like a spy. With his prominent glasses and equally prominent grin, he could be a copier salesman or the owner of a string of convenience stores.

But the Rhonesboro, Texas, native in fact is one of the premier United States intelligence officers of the post-World War II era. Among other things, Mr. Inman, a retired vice-admiral, has been director of naval intelligence, vice-director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, chief of the National Security Agency (NSA), and deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

"This country does need to have strong, healthy, viable intelligence organizations," insists Inman, now head of MCC Corporation, a microelectronics research company.

For the most part, the US public supports this goal, he says — with the caveat that spy agencies never again "resort to domestic surveillance," as they did through the Vietnam war.

Washington

The abuses of the past — CIA spying on antiwar protesters, NSA perusal of US telegrams headed overseas — weren't entirely the fault of espionage agencies, says Inman. "These weren't things the intelligence agencies decided, 'Gee, wouldn't that be great to do?' They all flow from decisions at senior levels of the executive branch, [telling] the intelligence community to do them," he says.



Bobby Ray Inman

Today there is little likelihood of another Operation Chaos (the illegal CIA domestic spying program) or Operation Shamrock, NSA's long-term scanning of US telegrams headed overseas, says Inman. But with the NSA's electronic ears sucking up information all over the world, "the prospect of incidental, unintentioned acquisition of information on US individuals is a reality," he admits.

NSA procedures guard against abuse of this data, he says. When it is recognized that a message contains the identity of a US citizen, that identity is suppressed.

-- P. G.